

## STUDI

# On The Adequacy of Emotions and Existential Feelings

Achim Stephan<sup>(α)</sup>

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**Abstract** In the analytic tradition of the philosophy of emotions the folk notion of adequacy is understood with regard to – at least four – different questions, viz. (a) a *moral* question, (b) a *prudential* question, (c) an *epistemic* question, and (d) a *fittingness* (or *correctness*) question. Usually, the fittingness question is treated as being the central one. I have some doubts concerning this assessment, particularly when it comes to substantial – interpersonal or cultural – controversies about whether a specific emotional response is adequate or whether a specific event deserves the emotional responses it triggers. To approach these matters, I recommend first doing without the established distinctions, for they may prematurely tempt us into assessing the adequacy of emotional responses in terms of one of these categories thereby overlooking other features that deserve attention. Instead, I will start with the folk notion of adequacy and then refine stepwise the conceptual landscape to get closer to what the crucial issues of adequacy are. **KEYWORDS:** Philosophy of Emotions; Emotional Atmospheres; Existential Feelings; Adequacy of Emotional Responses.

**Riassunto** *L'adeguatezza delle emozioni e dei sentimenti esistenziali* – All'interno della tradizione analitica della filosofia delle emozioni la nozione comune di adeguatezza è presa in considerazione in relazione ad almeno quattro diversi problemi: (a) un primo è di carattere *morale*; (b) un secondo riguarda la *discrezionalità*; (c) un terzo è di tipo *epistemico* e (d) un quarto concerne l'*appropriatezza* (o *correttezza*). Di solito, all'*appropriatezza* viene riservata maggiore importanza. Personalmente nutro diversi dubbi su questa valutazione, in particolare quando si tratta di dirimere questioni sostanziali – interpersonali o culturali –, se una data risposta emotiva è adeguata o se un dato evento merita la risposta emotiva che ha innescato. Per affrontare questi problemi, mi sento in primo luogo di suggerire di fare a meno delle distinzioni maggiormente in uso, poiché possono spiprematuramente a valutare l'adeguatezza delle risposte emotive nei termini una delle categorie già menzionate, trascurando quindi altre proprietà degne di attenzione. Intendo invece partire dalla nozione di adeguatezza propria del senso comune e poi gradualmente raffinare il panorama concettuale, per approssimarmi ai problemi fondamentali dell'adeguatezza.

**PAROLE CHIAVE:** Filosofia delle emozioni; Atmosfere emotive; Sentimenti esistenziali; Adeguatezza delle risposte emotive

<sup>(α)</sup> Institut für Kognitionswissenschaft, Universität Osnabrück, Wachsbleiche 27 - 49090 Osnabrück (D)

E-mail: [achim.stephan@uos.de](mailto:achim.stephan@uos.de) (✉)



IN THE ANALYTIC TRADITION OF the philosophy of emotions it is commonplace to emphasize that the question of whether or not a particular emotional response (E) is adequate needs further distinctions and clarifications. The folk notion of adequacy can be understood with regard to – at least four – different questions, viz. (a) a *moral* question: Is it (morally) right to respond emotionally with E?; (b) a *prudential* question: Is it good for the emoter to respond emotionally with E?; (c) an *epistemic* question: Is it justified to respond emotionally with E?; and eventually (d) a *fittingness* (or *correctness*) question: Is E properly tracking the (evaluative) features of the situation or object the emotional response is directed at? Justin D’Arms and Daniel Jacobson<sup>1</sup> argue convincingly that moral and prudential issues should not be confused with the issue of fittingness; and Julien Deonna and Fabrice Teroni<sup>2</sup> make an equally strong point for the independence of the fittingness question from the epistemic question.

In the current debate on the adequacy of emotions most participants, actually, take the fittingness question to be the leading one. I have some doubts concerning this assessment, particularly when it comes to substantial – interpersonal or cultural – controversies about whether a specific emotional response is adequate or whether a specific event deserves the emotional responses it triggers. In such cases, a seemingly innocent position about the metaphysics of the fittingness relation is not of much help,<sup>3</sup> particularly, if no-one is in the position to judge from a “God’s point of view” whether an emotional response really tracks the evaluative features of the corresponding situation. To approach these matters, I rather recommend first doing without the established distinctions as introduced above, for they may prematurely tempt us into assessing the adequacy of emotional responses in terms of one of these categories thereby overlooking other features that deserve attention. Instead, I will start with the folk notion of adequacy and then refine stepwise – making use of less familiar notions – the conceptual landscape to get closer to

what, I think, are the crucial issues of adequacy. When suitable I will also allude to the more established notions.

### ■ Emotional responses with a *fundamentum in re* and a *fundamentum in persona*

Amongst philosophers and psychologists there is widespread consensus that both longer lasting emotions such as, for instance, bearing a grudge or life-long grief, and brief emotional episodes such as a passing fear or joy are directed towards goings-on in the world – to events, situations, persons or objects – and present them in a specific manner, that is to say, they have intentionality.<sup>4</sup> Emotions, however, do not only reveal aspects of the (external) world, but always also the particular subjective situation of the feeling subject.<sup>5</sup> If someone, for instance, is afraid of a danger (which is a way of presenting the world as dangerous – given one’s coping possibilities) she will also and at the same time feel threatened (which is a way of presenting oneself as vulnerable – given the worldly event). Moreover, the fear refers to the fact that one’s core motives and desires are not satisfied, in this case, for security and corporeal integrity. If someone, on the other hand, grieves for an irretrievable loss, she will at the same time feel left behind and bereft. In bearing a grudge, we perceive something to be an offense against us – usually the actions or the comportment of another person who affects us by their cold manner. Concomitantly, we experience ourselves as disappointed, attacked, treated with contempt or damaged by what the other person has or has not done. Our desire for respect and recognition has not been taken into account.

Each instance of an emotional feeling is such an instance of feeling oneself in light of something, where the two poles (feeling-onself and feeling in light of) are inextricably intertwined. The reciprocity of self- and world-reference in emotional processes, which has to be conceived against the backdrop of cultural pre-figurations essentially constitutes the

meaning of emotions as the specific subjective evaluation of the world: by means of emotions the world, in a felt manner, is assessed with a view to those aspects which are of particular significance to the feeling person.

With such a diagnosis we have set the frame for inquiring about the appropriateness (or adequacy) of emotional reactions.<sup>6</sup> In order to assess whether an emotion is appropriate we again have to take into account both the world and the subject, although in slightly different ways. Appropriate emotions, as Jean Moritz Müller has put it,<sup>7</sup> are grounded both in the matter (*fundamentum in re*) as well as in the person (*fundamentum in persona*). Furthermore they also seem to have a foundation in culture (*fundamentum in cultu*): for usually members of our (or another) social environment show us whether they find our emotional reactions appropriate and acceptable.

In order to introduce and elucidate the various factors that play an important role with a view to considerations on the adequacy of emotional reactions, I begin with a rather simple case: a winegrower who, in late summer, is looking forward to a particularly good grape harvest, hears of an impending thunderstorm on the weather report, which, in all likelihood, will come with torrential rain and hail. He worries that the forecasted thunderstorm could ruin his harvest. As the first raindrops fall, he experiences inner agitation and tension. Shortly thereafter, in light of the lemon-sized hailstones that begin to hit his house, these turn into full-blown fear, interspersed with flights of panic and despair. He also struggles with the thought that, previously, hail insurance had seemed inappropriately pricey and that he therefore had not taken out any insurance. After the thunderstorm has passed, he inspects his vineyards. He is relieved to find that his best vineyards have not been hit.

With the background of this brief episode, we can already identify some of the central components which are relevant to the considerations on the adequacy of emotional

processes (cf. Figure 1):<sup>8</sup>

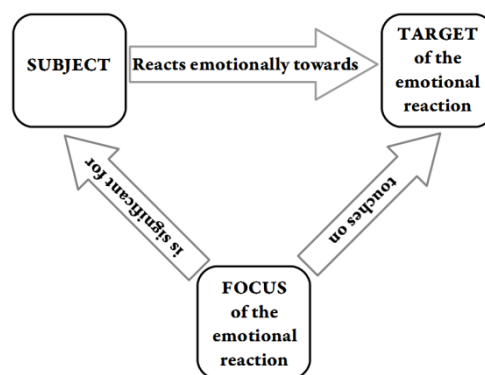


Figure 1. Triangulation of emotional reactions

The various emotional stirrings of the winegrower, the SUBJECT reacting emotionally, are all directed towards something – the TARGET of these respective emotional reactions. In general, the TARGET can be an event, a state of affairs, an object, another person, but also oneself. In this short vignette we encountered three emotions with three different objects: the winegrower's fear of the potentially devastating thunderstorm, his anger towards himself insofar as he struggles with his failure to have taken out an insurance contract at the right time, and eventually his relief that most of his grapes have remained intact.

But why do the (three) TARGETS cause emotional reactions and, even more importantly, why the particular ones mentioned here? Obviously they all touch on something that is of significance for the winegrower – the FOCUS of the emotions, i.e. the SUBJECT's background concern that makes the emotional response intelligible. *Prima facie* it is fully ripened grapes, but behind this lies the intention to make wine from them: good wine that can be sold all over Germany, to make a living on the profits thereof, to feed his family, to continue growing wine in his vineyards. So it is his own existence that is in focus; this is what he is concerned about.

The emotional reactions of the winegrower seem plausible and thus appropriate,

since their TARGETS, that is, what they are directed towards (the thunderstorm, himself, the grapes), actually have properties that seriously touch on what is of significance for him (the FOCUS of his emotions):<sup>9</sup> The thunderstorm bringing hail is threatening for him since it could destroy his harvest, his past failure to get insurance is annoyingly self-inflicted, as it bars him from being compensated for the damage expected, the intactness of the grapes is joyfully relieving, insofar as the expected devastation was avoided. So here everything is in order. The various aspects indeed touch upon the same FOCUS of his emotional reactions – his professional subsistence.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, an overarching pattern becomes evident in this episode, within which the individual emotional stirrings can be seen as parts of a greater coherent context. If this pattern were broken by some means or other there would be cause to start questioning, for instance, if *ceteris paribus* the winegrower did not feel relief in light of the fact that his vineyards were spared. It would be just as strange if the meaningfulness of the FOCUS of his emotional reactions did not also surface in other situations, for instance, if *ceteris paribus* he remained indifferent that a murder of crows eating his grapes or new EU regulations made selling his wine more complicated. To sum up, only in such an overarching pattern does each individual emotional reaction find its proper place.<sup>11</sup> At the same time it contributes to the meaningfulness, which the FOCUS of the respective emotional reactions possesses.<sup>12</sup>

In our analysis so far, we see that the appropriateness of an individual emotional reaction (both as regards its type and its intensity) is dependent on at least two factors. On the one hand, it must have a *fundamentum in re*, that is, the object towards which it is directed must be “worth” being its TARGET; on the other hand, it must also have a *fundamentum in persona*, that is, the import of the FOCUS of an individual emotional reaction must be rooted in an overarching coherent

pattern that results from a multitude of emotional reactions. If one of these two foundations is missing the emotional reaction appears to be, in some respect, questionable or inappropriate.

Typical examples of emotional reactions that seem inappropriate because they lack a *fundamentum in re*, even though an overarching pattern becomes apparent which gives the individual emotional reactions a coherent frame, are, for example, the various phobias such as acrophobia, aviophobia or claustrophobia. Usually a person suffering from acrophobia will react equally phobically no matter whether they are on a high bridge, a church steeple or on a steep cliff in the mountains. Correspondingly, they feel great relief if they are no longer exposed to these situations. So even though emotional reactions of this type seem to have a *fundamentum in persona*, a *fundamentum in re* is hardly ascribable to them: The high bridge is secured by a railing, statistically speaking, flying is much safer than ordinary road traffic, usually elevators do not get stuck etc. Generally, people with such phobias are well aware that there are no real grounds for their emotional response, they realize that their phobias are inadequate and in need of regulation. In fact, it is often for this reason that they turn to a therapist.

Next to emotional reactions, which lack a *fundamentum in re*, there can also be emotional reactions which lack (or seem to lack) a *fundamentum in persona*. This is the case when there are good reasons for doubting the actual significance of the seeming FOCUS of an emotional reaction for the subject. Whether a FOCUS actually has import for an emotionally involved SUBJECT can, as we have seen, hardly be found in an individual emotional reaction, but only in a whole plethora of emotional reactions to situations in which the same FOCUS is touched upon.<sup>13</sup> In this sense, highly variable reactions with a seemingly unchanging FOCUS – indifference versus serious concern that something particular happens – can indicate a lacking coherent *fundamentum in per-*

*sona*. Fluctuations of such an extent would at the same time puzzle others with regard to the seriousness of the motives of the involved SUBJECT or call into question the stability of their personality. It may, however, be due to rapidly changing perspectives on the world – as is observable in borderline personalities – that even some of these reactions have a *fundamentum in persona*.

The fluctuations in a SUBJECT's emotional reactions concerning the same or similar TARGETS with a seemingly unchanging FOCUS can also be grounded in an underlying ambivalence. However, ambivalent emotional reactions need not be erratic, they may have a *fundamentum in persona*. Certain events give cause for both positive as well as negative emotional reactions. In this sense, one and the same TARGET (e.g. the marriage of one's daughter to her beloved boyfriend; being offered a professorship at a reputable university) can make one very happy and at the same time entail consequences that one deeply regrets or worries about (in case of one's daughter's marriage, she could move far away so that only few opportunities remain for meeting her; taking the professorship at the reputable university could necessitate commuting and be a hindrance to continuing family life as one would like to, to jointly raising kids, for instance, because one's partner is professionally tied to one's family home etc.). In such cases, in German we figuratively speak of seeing them with one "laughing" and one "crying eye". If the positive (or the negative) aspect outweighs the other, emotional reactions are imbued with a slightly contradictory coloring, the dominating tone, however remains stable. Sometimes, however, both emotional reactions are genuinely in equilibrium. What is positive about an event is completely balanced out by the negative aspect. In such ambivalent situations, especially in the context of difficult decisions, the pendulum between agreement and disagreement can oscillate wildly without warranting the conclusion that the emotional reaction does not have a solid *fundamentum in persona*:

the SUBJECT is simply torn between the options. The situation *is* ambivalent in virtue of conflicting and equally important FOCI with respect to one and the same TARGET, and as such the ambivalent emotional reaction is appropriate in the situation.

### ■ Emotional responses from different perspectives

You may have noticed that I rather vaguely made use of the notions of "appropriateness" or "adequacy" when first commenting on the little vignettes. In fact, we have to distinguish a variety of remarkably different cases, for which, accordingly, different notions of adequacy should be introduced. In the following I discuss four constellations with regard to the technical notions introduced thus far, which are amended with third party perspectives that will pave the way to cultural aspects.

Remember first the case of phobias: although the emotional reaction has a *fundamentum in persona*, it has no *fundamentum in re*, and even more, this is not only noticed and acknowledged by third parties, but often also by the emotionally involved SUBJECT herself. Neither third parties nor the SUBJECT treat the emotional reaction as adequate. The TARGET does not deserve the emotional reaction – it is not fitting and the SUBJECT knows it. Therefore, we should regard these reactions indeed as *inadequate* emotional occurrences. Some philosophers, however, argue that even in cases like those of phobias, we should attribute some minimal rationality to the SUBJECT's emotional reactions.<sup>14</sup> Given that in some situations the world appears to be dangerous to the SUBJECT (or the subject perceives it to be dangerous) and furthermore, given that her emotional reaction has a *fundamentum in persona*, it should be judged to be (minimally) adequate for her to feel fear or to be frightened. I myself hesitate, however, to enlarge the space of adequacy (or rationality) for also capturing cases like these. The phobic (emotional) reaction *is* ir-

rational given what the SUBJECT believes about the true dangerousness of the situation and given what she wants to do. She can't control or regulate her emotions according to her own beliefs and convictions. These emotional reactions play their own game.

There is a closely related but in important aspects different second case, in which the emotional reactions of a SUBJECT again have a *fundamentum in persona*, while third parties notice and acknowledge that the reactions have no *fundamentum in re*. In contrast to the first case, however, here the SUBJECT (as the only one in town) insists that her emotional reactions have a *fundamentum in re*, e.g. when a SUBJECT reacts extremely angrily and justifies her reaction by insisting it is a response to what somebody else did, and that that was an offense. In cases like these we might say that the emotional reaction of the SUBJECT is intra-subjectively adequate given how the world appears to her. Given how she conceives of the corresponding situation, the emotional reaction is plausible. What may not be plausible is how she perceives the world and conceives of the situation, that's why we would say that her reaction is not inter-subjectively adequate.<sup>15</sup>

*Prima facie*, there are two more cases to be considered (*secunda facie* there are even more; I will get to those below.). The straightforward case is, of course, the opposite to the first, the phobic case, i.e., when an emotional reaction has both a *fundamentum in persona* and a *fundamentum in re*, and when also both the SUBJECT and third parties acknowledge that it has a *fundamentum in re* – that, then, is a case for genuinely adequate emotional reactions – being intra- and inter-subjectively adequate.

What remains to be considered is the case where a SUBJECT treats her own emotional reactions as being inadequate whereas third parties may judge it to be adequate. In particular, this might occur when the SUBJECT falls short of her own normative standards while emotionally reacting in a way that might nevertheless be fitting with regard to

the situation (e.g. by reacting atypically angrily towards someone who repeatedly behaved unfairly). Here, we have an emotional reaction that is inter-subjectively adequate, while it appears intra-subjectively inadequate. Things get even more complicated, when we enlarge our considerations to cultural differences, which move us into possibly opposing inter-subjective stances.

### Emotional responses and their *fundamentum in cultu*

Judgments of the appropriateness of many emotional reactions are made in a certain cultural context, which can range from family traditions at the small-scale to societal currents at the large-scale. Within this context – especially with a view to public social interaction – it is more or less implicitly “defined” whether a certain annoying event should give cause to reactions such as indignation or anger or whether it can be tolerated. Conversely, the same holds for praiseworthy action or ones to be evaluated positively. There are also implicit cultural rules that define to which degree and by means of which form of expression, for instance, a great personal loss is to be grieved. While for several emotions there seem to be virtually universal ideas of how their appropriateness is to be assessed, it is beyond doubt that there also exist massive differences (or changes) with regard to the evaluation of some other emotional reactions to comparatively similar events, both between different cultures as well as between different epochs within the same cultural current. Partly this is tied to the (also essentially culturally pre-figured) question of what is considered to be stylistically impeccable, morally prescribed, permitted or prohibited. In this sense, today we find it hard to believe the fiery emotional reactions fuelled by moral indignation with which the 1951 film *Die Sünderin* (*The Sinner*) as well as its lead actress Hildegard Knef were met:<sup>16</sup> the archbishop of Cologne, Cardinal Joseph Frings, condemned the film in a pastoral let-

ter, which was publicly read in February as the film premiered. Priests threw stink bombs in cinemas and politicians distributed leaflets with headings such as “The Sinner – an offense to any decent German woman! Prostitution and Suicide! Are these supposed to be the ideals of a people?” How is this situation to be analyzed?

The TARGET of the emotional reactions aiming in the same direction was the nationwide premiere of the film *Die Sünderin*; but the reactions were also directed at the cinemas in which the film was shown as well as at the actors involved and the director. The reason why the film became the TARGET of these intense emotional reactions can be seen in the statements of those involved: It touched on “public moral standards” or what could be seen as the ideals of a people. In what the film shows these people saw these ideals as violated and damaged. For this reason, they considered the film and the behavior of those involved in its production and distribution to be “offensive”. At the same time, they considered the FOCUS of their emotional reactions – public moral standards – to be of the utmost importance, both for themselves and for society in general. If one takes into account the FOCUS and its significance for those feeling indignation, their reaction appears comprehensible in a certain manner. The TARGET of their indignation indeed has properties that could call into question the moral standards (presupposed by them).

However, what, according to our contemporary understanding, makes these emotional reactions appear inadequate is the fact that we (no longer) share the FOCUS presupposed at the time. The coordinate system in terms of the question of what can be seen as morally acceptable behavior and what significance this has for public life has, in the meantime, shifted significantly. What was seen as significant for public moral standards sixty years ago has lost this significance. Against the backdrop of our now very liberal culture, we no longer ascribe properties to

the film that could give cause for indignation: it isn’t offensive. We would react neither to the behavior of the *Sinner* nor to similar actual behaviors of other people with indignation. In this sense, the condemning emotional reactions no longer have a *fundamentum in re* with a view to the contents of the film.<sup>17</sup>

A similar tension between the emotional reactions of others and one’s own assessment, just as we have seen it with reference to events that took place in Germany sixty years ago, can also be felt in the present when we take a look at subcultural enclaves in our own country (or elsewhere) and, for instance, hear that actions perceived as violations of honor repeatedly lead to excessive outbursts of violence or that young couples in Iran are faced with indignation and aggression by self-appointed guardians of “decency” just because they dared to hold hands in public. These emotional reactions, too, have no *fundamentum in re* according to our own cultural background. The *fundamentum in persona* that they no doubt have is usually scaffolded by a *fundamentum in cultu* that those involved emotionally share with some (or even many) who feel the same way. It could hardly establish itself *in persona* without this (sub-) cultural background.

Without doubt, considering the – as we have seen, indispensable – cultural dimension will lead to further intricacies, when discussing the adequacy of emotional reactions. Some emotional reactions seem to have their *fundamentum in re* only against the background of corresponding specific cultural imprints: there, it is the particular cultural framework that establishes and defines the significance of the FOCUS for all members of such an emotionally affected social group and hence for each of its single subjects; and it is this FOCUS that underlies their various emotional reactions (the FOCUS, then, is truly affected by the TARGETS of their emotional reactions, and insofar their emotional reactions have a *fundamentum in re*). This issue definitely deserves further consideration and

analysis. Though, we can see already, that emotional reactions or intuitions *per se* won't be suitable for deciding between radically conflicting reactions and attitudes: As little as we find offense today in the movie *Die Sünderin* – against the background of our own cultural imprint – as much was it a cause for indignation for many people of our grandparent's generation. To assess the adequacy of such antagonistic emotional reactions in a way that does not refer to empty culture-relativistic flowery phrases, we will presumably need for reasons that do not rely on affects themselves.

Definitely critical are situations in which we see a tension between the immediate emotional reactions of an individual and the demands of his or her social environment, particularly if these demands (or habits and practices) seem to come at the expense of the mainly concerned subject. Bowlby has extensively commented on this issue with regard to tolerating feelings of anger in the context of grief aroused by the loss of loved ones: «The frequency with which anger occurs as part of normal mourning has, we believe, habitually been underestimated – perhaps because it seems so out of place and shameful».<sup>18</sup> Elaborating this point in more detail he writes:

There is now evidence that the most intense and most disturbing affects aroused by loss are fear of being abandoned, yearning for the lost figure, and anger that she cannot be found – affects linked, on the one hand, with an urge to search for the lost figure and, on the other, with a tendency to reproach angrily anyone who seems to the bereaved to be responsible for the loss or to be hindering recovery of the lost person. With his whole emotional being, it seems, a bereaved person is fighting fate, trying desperately to turn back the wheel of time and to recapture the happier days that have been suddenly taken from him. So far from facing reality and trying to come to terms with it, a be-

reaved person is locked in a struggle with the past. Plainly, if we are to give the kind of help to a bereaved person that we should all like to give, it is essential we see things from his point of view and respect his feelings – unrealistic though we may regard some of them.<sup>19</sup>

What Bowlby has in mind here, is what some while ago Sigmund Freud has dubbed “psychical reality”<sup>20</sup> (in contrast to material reality) and what in a slightly modified form Heinz Hartmann has called “inner reality”.<sup>21</sup> Both emphasize that imaginations of any kind are *psychically real* and for our mental condition are of the greatest importance, even if it is directed at (and presupposes) *unrealistic* scenarios (such as unrealizable longing or the non-addressable anger mentioned above). Even if, after all, such strong emotions as unquenchable longing or immoderate anger seem to have no *fundamentum in re*, it may make sense that the social environment withdraws the commonly accepted claim that our emotional reactions should have a *fundamentum in re* and rather accepts the feelings of the bereaved person in all its facets. According to Bowlby, feelings such as

[y]earning for the impossible, intemperate anger, impotent weeping, horror at the prospect of loneliness, pitiful pleading for sympathy and support [...] are feelings that a bereaved person needs to express, and sometimes first to discover, if he is to make progress. Yet, these are all feelings that are apt to be regarded as unworthy and unmanly. At best to express them may seem humiliating; at worst it may be to court criticism and contempt. No wonder such feelings so often go unexpressed, and may later go underground.<sup>22</sup>

From Bowlby's diagnostic findings we may conclude that some emotional reactions should be treated as appropriate even when they appear “unfitting” or when they seem to violate cultural norms and standards;<sup>23</sup> par-



ticularly so, if the expression of these emotions and their experience plays an important role in the psychical health of the emotionally involved person (and provided that nobody else is harmed by these emotional reactions).

So, what then, is different here, compared to the case of the phobic person? The feelings of the bereaved person usually have a *fundamentum in persona*, and they seemingly lack a *fundamentum in re*. The apparent lack of a *fundamentum in re* is often acknowledged by both the SUBJECT and by third parties. So, why not say again that the seemingly unfitting emotional responses are inadequate tout court? What is the reason for Bowlby to take a different stance towards the bereaved person than the phobic person? Among other things it has to do with the therapist's caring viewpoint: if the SUBJECT's well-being is of primary import, if we think of her space of possibilities as what should count, then we notice a distinction between the two cases. The phobic is in another sense a "bereaved person", she has e.g. to forego against her own will a hiking tour, say, in the Alps even where her children happily continue their walk on a hilly path. She can't counteract and control her feelings of fear or panic that harmfully shrink her possibilities. Thus, plainly, having these feelings is inadequate for *all* parties. The truly bereaved person who has lost a close partner or friend, on the other hand, would increase her possibilities if she would permit and accept her feelings. She was and is able to control or suppress her feelings of longing and anger towards the lost person; but it seems to have import, first, to acknowledge these feelings to overcome them on the long run, and to regain a balanced life and affectivity. That is why third parties and the SUBJECT should give up enforcing the suppression of these emotional reactions, even if they miss a *fundamentum in re*. Thus, permitting and accepting these feelings should count as *transiently* appropriate from a prudential perspective; if they carry on forever, something went wrong, but expressing them, feeling them, is of the

greatest importance to overcoming them in the long run.

### ■ Existential feelings from perspectives of adequacy

Emotional reactions that occur in cases of the loss of loved ones resemble a couple of features that characterize distressing (and agonizing) existential feelings as they sometimes appear in psychopathological states. In contrast to emotions, existential feelings are not directed towards anything *specific*; rather, they disclose – in a far more general form of affective intentionality – the world as a whole. As background orientations they structure our more specific encounters with the world – *how* and *what* we perceive, feel, experience, think and act.<sup>24</sup> In that sense their appropriateness has to be explored and assessed in a different way.

It is mainly the merit of Matthew Ratcliffe to have made clear what essential, although often hidden role existential feelings play in our daily affairs, how they change in psychopathologies and what that means for the patients. He also provided the following listing, which gives a first impression of the spectrum of existential feelings:

The world as a whole can sometimes appear unfamiliar, unreal, distant or close. It can be something that one feels apart from or at one with. One can feel in control of one's overall situation or overwhelmed by it. One can feel like a participant in the world or like a detached, estranged observer staring at objects that do not feel quite "there". Such relationships structure all experience.<sup>25</sup>

Elsewhere, I have made suggestions regarding how to structure the huge variety of existential feelings and to differentiate between some important classes of these feelings.<sup>26</sup> Accordingly, we should distinguish elementary existential feelings from non-elementary ones – and, as a contrast class,

*atmospheric* feelings from both. Elementary existential feelings remain largely unnoticed under normal life circumstances. They are in the background of our affective lives and provide us with a sense of reality: of ourselves, our actions, other persons and objects, and the surrounding world as such. Feelings of this sort, however, can change. In particular, they are distorted in specific ways in psychopathologies that go along with a decrease or complete loss of common feelings of reality. Thus, in depersonalization disorder one's own reality is not felt any more in a proper way: the (normal) agent's perspective on the world is gone, subjects experience very flat affectivity, and in the worst cases, they might even develop the feeling of being dead already. In schizophrenia and derealization episodes, the reality of the world as a whole is shaken to the core – the reference to the world, in general, or to other human beings is affected, and in major depression the immediate grip on the world is gone, the feeling of agency (or of being an agent within a world full of possibilities) fades away. For those who undergo these alterations the whole framework of experience – perceptions, feelings, and agency – changes dramatically.<sup>27</sup>

In contrast, non-elementary existential feelings can change without involving any severe distortion from normal mental functioning. Nevertheless, do they, too, structure our space of possibilities in the background of our attention. They comprise feelings that concern one's own vital state (such as feeling healthy and strong, versus feeling exhausted and weak), or that reflect one's position within social environments (such as feeling welcome and familiar, versus feeling disrespected and rejected), or that manifest one's standing towards the world in general (such as feeling at home or as a participant in the tide of events, versus feeling disconnected, like a stranger or not at home in this world). Most of these feelings, and particularly the more negative ones, can also occur within those very time spans in which elementary existential feelings have shifted to non-normal conditions. In general,

all background feelings can appear in complex blending.

In contrast to both elementary and non-elementary existential feelings, atmospheric feelings relate to specific events and situations, and thus, we are more aware of them than of existential feelings proper. Like existential feelings, they pre-structure our interactions with others and the world – often, however, only in the very situation in which they are triggered. As existential feelings, atmospheric feelings also comprise self-related feelings (such as feeling looked at), feelings that concern our social environment (such as feeling an open and friendly atmosphere while giving a talk), and feelings that relate to the world in general (such as feeling agitated in the middle of a nervous and uproarious city-center).<sup>28</sup>

As we have seen, existential feelings are not directed at some *specific* event or object. Insofar as they have no genuine TARGET – i.e., for constitutional reasons they can't have a *fundamentum in re* – and hence they have no FOCUS.<sup>29</sup> Some existential feelings, as they are salient in depression, (or the state of being depressed) might have, however, a severe impact on how we emotionally react towards the world. Thus, what seems inadequate in depression is that many patients do not feel anything when they should feel something or when they should react emotionally.<sup>30</sup> In these cases the TARGET would still deserve to lead to an emotional reaction; it still touches on the (former) FOCUS of the SUBJECT, but the FOCUS has no longer any import for the SUBJECT. Thus, for third parties it still looks as if the SUBJECT should care for her FOCUS, therefore it is inter-subjectively inadequate to not show emotional reactions. For the SUBJECT, however, it is intra-subjectively adequate to show no emotional reactions, due to the fact that the FOCUS on which the TARGET touches, has lost its import for her.

From a widened perspective (or on another level) existential feelings may be at odds (or in line) with a FOCUS that is still of great importance for a SUBJECT. In such a case, existential feelings will themselves –

qua background feelings – become the objects of appraisals and emotional reactions. Thus, we may notice a severe tension between what, on the one hand, our existential feelings reveal about our space of possibilities in general, and how, on the other hand, we ideally would like to be and behave (according to some second order volitions). If, for example, it is of great importance to us that we understand ourselves as agents that are in control of the tide of events and are able to do what corresponds to our main concerns in a responsible and self-determined way, then background feelings that signal to us feebleness, impairment, and the loss of our capacity to act, may evoke intense unease, and even anxiety, despair, or panic. If these alterations are mainly those of non-elementary existential feelings and (perhaps) due to a three-day-virus, we may take notice of them in a rather even-tempered fashion – knowing that we are just undergoing a transient malaise. Things look quite differently in the case of incapacities to act in consequence of burn out or major depression, which are not experienced as momentary and passing. Here, we perceive the corresponding existential feelings (and the general condition we are in) to be truly alarming and in dire need of modification. While, after all, we may appraise the exhaustion and lassitude that go along with a common cold – given the corresponding state of health – even as “adequate”, states of being detached from the world that go along with depression or fundamental alterations of our sense of reality that go along with depersonalization or derealisation disorders do not appear acceptable, not least due to their persistence that is hardly organically comprehensible. We don’t want to have such feelings, since they present to us the world and the space of our possibilities in a “crack-brained” way. This means that (implicitly) we don’t see them as adequate either. These feelings just aren’t good for acting in the world.

But also in these cases, we must learn to accept – just as in the case of anger in the

context of mourning described by Bowlby – that the dominating existential feelings reflect the “inner reality” of the person concerned and are to be accepted as what they are. Only then, as further steps we might consider how to bring these distressing unbalanced existential background feelings back to poise. The possibilities for regulating such woebegone existential feelings, however, are more restricted than we might wish.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> J. D’ARMS, D. JACOBSON, *The Moralistic Fallacy: On the “Appropriateness” of Emotions*, in: «Philosophy and Phenomenological Research», vol. LXI, n. 1, 2000, pp. 65-90, here p. 66 and 71.

<sup>2</sup> See J. DEONNA, F. TERONI, *The Emotions. A Philosophical Introduction*, Routledge, Abingdon 2012, pp. 6-7.

<sup>3</sup> D’Arms and Jacobson state that they will not «pursue the question of how the metaphysics of emotional fittingness is best understood – such as whether it answers to a realm of evaluative facts», see J. D’ARMS, D. JACOBSON, *The Moralistic Fallacy: On the “Appropriateness” of Emotions*, cit., p. 72, fn. 15.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., N.H. FRIJDA, *Varieties of Affect: Emotions and Episodes, Moods, and Sentiments*, in: P. EKMAN, R.J. DAVIDSON (eds.), *The Nature of Emotion. Fundamental Questions*, Oxford University Press, Oxford/New York 1994, pp. 59-67; R. DE SOUSA, *Emotion*, in: E.N. ZALTA (ed.), *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Spring Edition 2010, URL: <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2010/entries/emotion>>, retrieved on 2011, February 25th; D. PERLER, *Transformationen der Gefühle. Philosophische Emotionstheorien 1270-1670*, Fischer, Frankfurt a.M. 2011.

<sup>5</sup> See J. SLABY, A. STEPHAN, *Affective Intentionality*

and *Self-Consciousness*, in: «Consciousness and Cognition», vol. XVII, n. 2, 2008, pp. 506-513. “Aspects of the world” may also be thoughts and actions of the emotionally responding subject: one can be scared by one’s own desires, ashamed by one’s own misconducts or be afraid of one’s aggressive impulses. The structure of “feeling-oneself in light of” applies also to these cases, however.

<sup>6</sup> I use the notions of “adequacy” and “appropriateness” synonymously.

<sup>7</sup> See J.M. MÜLLER, *Emotion, Wahrnehmung und evaluative Erkenntnis*, in: J. SLABY, A. STEPHAN, H. WALTER, S. WALTER (eds.), *Affektive Intentionalität*, Mentis, Paderborn 2011, pp. 100-127, here p. 126.

<sup>8</sup> The terminology of “TARGET” and “FOCUS” takes up a distinction introduced in B. HELM, *Emotional Reason. Deliberation, Motivation, and the Nature of Value*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001, p. 34 and p. 69.

<sup>9</sup> This is what traditionally has been called the “formal object” of the emotion (see A. KENNY, *Action, Emotion and Will*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1963, pp. 134ff.): the formal object is a property, which the emotional response implicitly attributes to its TARGET and in virtue of which the response appears plausible. If the TARGET actually has these properties – as is here the case – the emotional response is also fitting, in the sense elaborated by D’Arms and Jacobson.

<sup>10</sup> It need not be the *same* FOCUS of course; different emotional responses of a person might relate to one FOCUS concerning her professional subsistence (as it is here the case), to another FOCUS concerning her leisure activities and still to another concerning her political attitudes. What is important is that these various emotions relate to *some* FOCUS that covers the concerns of the person.

<sup>11</sup> For those who are trained to think in terms of fittingness, it might make sense to characterize a *single* emotional reaction as fitting, even if it does not “fit” the person’s *overall* emotional reactive pattern.

<sup>12</sup> It is mainly the merit of Bennett Helm to have carefully explored the holistic structure of emotional settings (see B. HELM, *Emotional Reason*, cit.).

<sup>13</sup> Over longer periods of time, the import someone or something has for oneself can change, though. Love might fade away or even turn into hate, something important can become unimportant. With these changes the whole pattern of import reorganizes. This does not make emotional reactions of the past inadequate; they stem from and relate to a different pattern of import.

<sup>14</sup> Moritz Müller, personal communication; see also de Sousa’s *principle of minimal rationality* (see R. DE SOUSA, *The Rationality of Emotion*, MIT Press, Cambridge (MA) 1987, p. 160 and p. 185) and its application to psychotherapeutic cases (*ivi*, pp. 245-247).

<sup>15</sup> Intra-subjectively adequate emotions have some resemblance to what Deonna and Teroni have called (epistemically) *justified emotions* (see J. DEONNA, F. TERONI, *The Emotions*, cit., pp. 6-7 and pp. 96-98). Emotional responses that appear inter-subjectively inadequate may also count as not fitting – given that any third parties properly recognize the features of the situation.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. [http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Die\\_Sünderin](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Die_Sünderin) (retrieved on 2016, December 14th) and [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_image.cfm?image\\_id=993](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_image.cfm?image_id=993) (retrieved on 2016, December 14th).

<sup>17</sup> To be explicit, here: I do not raise the question of whether or not the condemning emotional reactions are *morally* right; rather I am interested in whether or not, as a matter of fact, it may be claimed that the film *deserves* these reactions.

<sup>18</sup> J. BOWLBY, *Separation and Loss within the Family* (1970), in: J. BOWLBY, *The Making and Breaking of Affectional Bonds*, Routledge, London/New York 1979, pp. 99-123, here p. 104.

<sup>19</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 113-114. Bowlby refers to a study of Maddison and Walker from 1967, in which they examined forty widows with respect to how they could cope with the loss of their loved ones. It turned out that those who could exhibit the full range of their feeling had a far better prognosis (see *ivi*, pp. 120-122).

<sup>20</sup> S. FREUD, *Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse* (1916-1917), in: S. FREUD, *Studienausgabe*, Bd. I, Fischer, Frankfurt a.M. 1989, p. 359 (En. trans. *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, in: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XVI, edited by J. STRACHEY, A. FREUD, The Hogarth Press, London 1975, p. 368).

<sup>21</sup> H. HARTMANN, *Notes on the Reality Principle*, in: «Psychoanalytic Study of the Child», vol. XI, 1956, pp. 31-53, here p. 52.

<sup>22</sup> J. BOWLBY, *Separation and Loss within the Family*, cit., p. 117.

<sup>23</sup> It may even be disputed whether the feelings of the bereaved person lack a *fundamentum in re*. In a specific sense they have – an inerrant – one: the loss of the loved person. It is just that strong feel-

ings of anger do not seem to be of the right type, particularly not, if the deceased had no intentions at all to abandon their partner. But who is in charge to claim that anger is not appropriate (and not fitting) towards somebody whose death in fact makes one lonely?

<sup>24</sup> See J. SLABY, A. STEPHAN, *Affective Intentionality and Self-Consciousness*, cit.

<sup>25</sup> M. RATCLIFFE, *Feelings of Being. Phenomenology, Psychiatry and the Sense of Reality*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2008, p. 37.

<sup>26</sup> See A. STEPHAN, *Emotion, Existential Feelings and their Regulation*, in: «Emotion Review», vol. IV, n. 2, 2012, pp. 157-162.

<sup>27</sup> Matthew Ratcliffe provides an extensive survey of altered existential feelings in various psychiatric disorders (see M. RATCLIFFE, *Feelings of Being*, cit., pp. 105-218).

<sup>28</sup> For more on such affective atmospheres see B. ANDERSON, *Affective Atmospheres*, in: «Emotion, Space and Society», vol. II, n. 2, 2009, pp. 77-81.

<sup>29</sup> Things are different in the case of atmospheric feelings. Since they relate to specific places, situations and events, we have some ways of checking inter-subjectively whether or not a particular situation is icy or friendly, or whether merely someone biasedly *perceives* it to be so. On another occasion, we might explore in more detail how existential feelings can be assessed with regard to moral, prudential, epistemic and fittingness questions of adequacy. Thus, feeling unreal while being real seems an unfitting existential feeling, although, given how the world appears to the SUBJECT, the distorted feeling may be comprehensible.

<sup>30</sup> About the emotional experience of depression, see K. JACOBS, A. STEPHAN, A. PASKALEVA, W. WILUTZKY, *Existential and Atmospheric Feelings in Depressive Comportment*, in: «Philosophy, Psychiatry & Psychology», vol. XXI, n. 2, 2014, pp. 89-110; M. RATCLIFFE, *Experiences of Depression. A Study in Phenomenology*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2015.